



Don't be run off the road by adversity

You can expect to find 23 roadblocks in your way today, everything from the minor annoyance of a traffic jam to a major snafu on the job.

How you handle these incidents might reveal how successful you are in life.

Paul Stoltz, an organizational development expert, tells us that life isn't getting any easier. A dozen years ago, people encountered only an average of seven obstacles per day. But now, we are asked to handle more information, deal with more issues and be more efficient in the process.

"Some people seem to thrive on the chaotic," he says. "You look at successful people and you see that something triggers inside them when the tough stuff hits. These are the people who get ahead."

Stoltz developed what he calls the adversity quotient, or AQ, a scientific tool he designed over the past 20 years to evaluate the ability of people to deal with challenges in their daily lives.

His new book, "Adversity Quotient @ Work," attempts to show how you can assess your ability to deal with problems and improve on that to become a more successful worker.

Encountering adversity

"This is a quest to understand human operating systems," Stoltz says. "We're required to be more entrepreneurial every day. Studies have shown us that the higher AQ entrepreneurs demonstrate higher innovation and make more than others."

We will encounter adversity in whatever we choose to do in life. Our coping skills often are what spell the difference between success and failure.

It just makes sense that companies pay attention to this.

Stoltz's research shows that people fall into three groups: climbers, the 10 percent who have a tremendous ability to cope with challenge and change; campers, the 80 percent who have some ability to cope but sometimes allow adversity to overwhelm them; and quitters, the 10 percent who deflect responsibility for dealing with change to others and generally perform poorly as a result.

"One of the most devastating things to do is surround the climbers with campers," Stoltz says. "That puts a lot of strain on (the climbers)."

And happier, too

Stoltz argues companies can boost the ability of people to handle adversity by 25 percent within 90 days, making them more valuable and happier employees along the way.

It's a concept that some large companies already have embraced, including Qualcomm in San Diego, where 160 managers have participated in Stoltz's AQ seminars. An additional 200 managers are scheduled to participate early next year.

Anne Walker, Qualcomm's director of learning and development, sees the ability to handle adversity and change as a leadership skill. She says Stoltz's program can help open communication channels.

"It gives people a way to talk about problems with each other and work toward positive results," Walker says. "We hear people using words and phrases they learned from Paul Stoltz, so we can see that it has made an impact."

The sooner we learn to deal with adversity the better off we will be.

"There's only going to be more adversity in the future," Stoltz promises.

Michael Kinsman writes about workplace issues. His e-mail address is michael.kinsman@uniontrib.com
Union-Tribune Publishing Co